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Dedicated To

Mr. and Mrs. Oscar M. Williams Sr.

EATING, SLEEPING AND ELIMINATIVE HABITS
OF INFANTS AND PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

BY

LEOMA DELLEE WILLIAMS

A Thesis in Child Care in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements
for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science
in the
Division of Home Economics
of the
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and
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Leoma Delle Williams

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INTRODUCTION

Until recent years, parents have thought little about habit formation and its importance in the lives of young children. Habit formation for young children centers about such processes as elimination, eating, sleeping, dressing and playing. These habits are of importance in physical and social growth, and "growing--up" implies the acquiring of them. From birth until they are well established, they constitute the axis of every child's daily program.

If parents would only stop and think of the time and energy that they could save through the early training of good habits, I am sure they would consider it well worth the while. According to my way of thinking, the person whose life does not fall into well-regulated habits is merely wasting conscious effort that might be set free for better uses. As the time goes on life becomes more complex, and it is more important that our children learn to economize conscious effort and reduce the excess of mental strain through proper organization of their lives.

Many parents, especially mothers, often remark, "I just can't see my way out, with all of this work on my hands." It is no doubt because she has not given her children the advantage of early habit training. Many households are thrown into a daily turmoil because children forget to wash their hands before each meal.

Every parent should have a knowledge of some underlying principles which may be applied to the learning of the child. The infant is in a state of ceaseless activity unless he is asleep. Legs, arms, hands, fingers and head are in more or

less constant motion. The eyes and ears are constantly receiving stimuli which result before long in definite learning on the part of the baby.

When a child is about to acquire a new habit, for instance, learning to play with a doll, we observe that he makes many unnecessary and useless movements. He holds it this way and that, he drops it and picks it up again. This tendency to make may seemingly useless and unnecessary movements has been described as, trial and error behavior.

Many parents forget that the child learns by making mistakes.

The second important principle in the building of a habit is the principle of much practice. Practice means many repetitions. The child who has great difficulty in lacing his shoes at three years of age may at five lace them with great ease because of his practice in the intervening period. Sometimes, on the other hand, the number of repetitions necessary to bring about a habit is surprisingly few. The month old baby in whom the undesirable habit of thumb-sucking is already well established brings us to the third principle.

The success of satisfaction which accompanies an act has much to do with the rapidity with which the habit is formed. A reaction with pleasant results is more quickly learned than one where no pleasure follows. The child gets satisfaction from sucking the thumb.

A fourth principle in habit formation is that of starting early and simply. We should establish habits when the child is most plastic and ready.

Concentration on the learning of a few habits at a time will prevent irritation and confusion.

EATING HABITS

So much depends on the establishment of regularity in the child's routine that it is almost impossible to over-emphasize the need of careful planning in the first few weeks of the baby's life. Even the mother may fall into the habit of picking the baby up when it cries, or of feeding it irregularly, if she does not strive hard for control. If a definite schedule of feeding is adhered to, the baby will be calmer, will sleep longer at a time, and will have both a better disposition and a better digestion, because of its peaceful, regular start in life. It is desired to keep to the approved hours in feeding. Changes in schedule which seem convenient at the moment may set up a habit difficult to change, even if practiced on only a few occasions.

The introduction of solid foods into the child's diet is very important for future habits of eating. The mother must know just how to present each new food in order to gain the child's confidence. If she gives a very small amount the first time the baby's attitude toward food will be more readily set in the right direction. The mother must have enough confidence to sincerely believe or expect that the baby will eat whatever is given him. She must not become discouraged if the baby spits out the new cereal or vegetable, it is no doubt because of the novelty of flavor and texture.

After the child has been on a liquid diet so long, which requires only to be sucked and swallowed, naturally he knows nothing except sucking and swallowing when suddenly introduced to a new food. When the food is expelled from the mouth by this sucking movement, the inexperienced mother will take this as an

indication that the child does not like the new food.

New foods should be introduced when the child's appetite is keenest. Give this new food in a very small amount alone with some well-liked food. We must not over-tax the child with a large amount of any new food because it is essential that the child form no unpleasant association with the new food in the beginning, even if, on the first few occasions, he eats only a teaspoonful.

Sometimes it is necessary to withhold the child's favorite food until the less desired, food has been eaten. Dessert should certainly be withheld until the child has eaten a sufficient amount and variety of other necessary foods. Mothers should not allow over anxiety and eagerness, on the part of the child, defeat her efforts to establish good habits.

The child should be allowed to feed himself as soon as he is able to hold a spoon and cup (twelve to eighteen months). He does not need to be taught to use a spoon. An extra one should be placed on the tray next to the one used by the adult to feed the child, and before long he will pick it up and use it. At first he will do it awkwardly, but if no comment is made, his methods will soon improve. The child should be expected to taste all foods set before him so that he may come to know that new and different food, but he should be allowed to eat as much or as little as he wants without any urging, coaxing, or reminding. In cases of dawdling the food should be calmly and unemotionally removed at the end of thirty or forty minutes with merely a comment that it is time to go on with the next activity.

All artificial incentives to get the child to eat should be avoided. Such practices as telling stories while the child eats, having him find the picture in the bottom of the dish, or

using dessert, candy or some pleasure as a reward, often prevent the building up of good eating habits. Parents should be cautioned especially against giving dessert as a reward or withholding it as a punishment. Dessert is part of a properly planned and balanced meal and is just as important nutritionally speaking as the the rest of the meal. Using dessert as a reward or punishment is undue stressing of food about which there should be no comment.

The careful, tasteful preparation of food is important in helping to form good eating habits. This does not mean that the mother should cater to the taste of the child, but that the food should be wholesomely and attractively served, with the same degree of care that is given in serving a meal to adults. Lack of proper planning often makes meal time a bad time for every one concerned, when it should be a happy time for the whole family. The best of appetites must not be put to the test of lumpy cereal, or soggy, poorly seasoned vegetables. The vegetables should be cooked quickly in as little water as possible, in order to retain their flavor. Serve, especially spinach, cut fine and sprinkled with the yolk of a hard boiled egg. It is then attractive to the adult as well as to the child.

From infancy the child should be accustomed to the flavor of new vegetables as frequently as they may be added to his diet. Children lose their appetite sometimes because they become bored with the monotony of foods served. Long gaps between serving seasonal vegetables are undesirable, as the child often must learn over again to like them. Mothers should use canned vegetables if she cannot get fresh ones. The child should be served a variety of cereals to avoid distastefulness on his part. In

addition to using four or five different cereals, a number of ways of varying the daily cereal will occur to the mother, such as: sprinkling the hot cereal with shredded coconut, or with a favorite cereal (dry); adding raisins, figs, or dates to the cereal when nearly cooked; using cereal in breads and cookies; or serving it with brown sugar and butter in place of milk.

While the mother is trying to keep the diet simple, it is easy to make the mistake of serving too often a few foods that we know are liked well and that are easy to get. Later on the child will have to make the adjustment to a variety of foods with greater difficulty.

Insistence on a varied diet does not mean that the child should be allowed to eat highly spiced or flavored adult foods.

The question often arises as to how early the child should eat at the family table. This must be answered differently in different family situations. A child who has not been allowed at the family table does not form the habit of asking for tastes of forbidden food. Once he appears at the table, it is hard to refuse pleas for the attractive things which the child sees his elders eating.

The mother must be confident of cooperation and expect for the child to eat what she has prepared for him. If the child refuses to eat, despite his mother's expectant attitude, his plate should be removed and no food of any kind given until the next meal hour. This requires courage on the part of the mother and cooperation from the family and neighbors.

The following points must be considered for the continuation of favorable eating habits: first, an abundance of exercise and fresh air. The baby should have a time to kick and stretch unclothed, and should sleep during the day either on a sheltered

porch, or in a room with two or more windows open. The older child, to be hungry must have from one to three hours of active exercise in the open air, depending upon the weather. He must have romping, active play if he is to be hungry.

There should be a cheerful and happy atmosphere at meal time. Haste, confusion, and worry interfere with the digestive process. Conversations at the table should be present. Avoid constant pressure on young children to live up to adult standards of table behavior. Expect the children to stay at the table a definite time, from twenty to thirty minutes, so that they will not be tempted to eat scantily or hurriedly. Freedom from strain and hurry, calmness and pleasantness on the part of the mother, will have much to do with the furthering good eating habits in the child.

Physicians feel, to some extent, the problem of non-hunger, or general indifference and resistance to food must be normal, because it is so frequent among children of the pre-school age.

If the child isn't hungry the mother should not worry, but merely reduce his diet. Sometimes the child has an acute illness, such as a common cold. Lack of appetite is often the first symptom of a "cold" or other illness. Instead of recognizing this probability, the mother urges the child to eat.

Decayed teeth, enlarged and infected tonsils, with the resulting spread of poisons in the blood stream may be responsible for non-hunger. Cookies or milk between meals decrease the likelihood of the child's eating at the next meal. Sweets particularly have the effect of temporarily satisfying hunger, without furnishing bulk of staying qualities. A diet too rich in one

element, such as sugar or fat may be the cause, Improper breathing due to enlarged adenoids leaves a bad taste in the mouth and lessens the desire for food.

Children are sometimes too tired to eat. The fifteen minutes rest before mealtime is highly recommended for parents as well as children. Short rest periods of perhaps ten to fifteen minutes, when taken regularly before dinner, will often change tense, nagging, snappy dinner hours to times of calm, pleasant interchange. For the child this period of relaxation before meals is especially important.

SLEEPING HABITS

The newborn baby sleeps most of the time. For six weeks or two months his waking time is limited practically to the hours when is fed and bathed. His growth--most rapid at this time--depends in part on the large proportion of time which he spends in quiet and solitude. We do not intend to deny the baby all the sleep he can use but we often create situations which make it easy for the child to remain awake. The child needs more sleep than the adult because he is growing.

Many mothers are perturbed over the fact that it takes their children a considerable amount of time to go to sleep after they go to bed. The results of a special study show that the average child takes twenty minutes to go to sleep. It takes time for a child to calm down, particularly when he has been playing hard or has been taken away from some engrossing activity. More patience should be shown by parents. A recent study of the bedtime of country and city children shows that all seasons and at all ages, country children secure less sleep than city children, and hence go to bed somewhat later.

It is a bad policy to stop the activities of the household so that the infant may sleep undisturbed by noise, it creates a very bad situation from the point of view of the persons ability, later on, to rest under adverse conditions. Of course, loud and sudden noises should be avoided.

In preparing for sleep, we reduce as far as possible the number of encroaching stimuli. We lie down, relax, close our eyes, darken the room, in short, cut out as many of the surrounding influences as possible, so that the organism may have all the help possible, so its task of recuperation. Children, especially those

nearing school age, should not be allowed to sleep so late in the morning, because, when he enters school he must rise at a fairly early hour. To a great extent, our habits of sleep are a result of experience and training.

Each child should sleep in a bed alone. The covers should be warm but light. A separate or individual bedroom is desirable. Children should not sleep in the same bedroom with the parents after early babyhood. Neither should they sleep in the same bed with a person of the opposite sex.

Proper ventilation is an important element in the child's sleep. The windows should be wide-open.

So called "laziness" in children is often found to be the result of lack of sleep, or of sleep under unfavorable conditions.

The young child should be in bed at an early hour. The evening should be a time of relaxation and recreation for older members of the family. Music, conversation, laughter serve as a necessary outlet for the adult but as stimulants for limited periods. The mother should be very careful to have the nap hour come early enough in the day so that the child will go on to sleep at bedtime and not lie awake for an hour before going to sleep.

The rhythmic nature of sleep makes it necessary that the bed and nap hours should be strictly kept.

A regular bedtime must be set and adhered to. The child should be warned a few minutes before bedtime that he must retire for the night. The parent should not be lax because the child will take advantage of him.

If a child wants to undress himself for bed, the parent should be patient and let him do it, even if it does waste some time at the beginning.

After being sure that all his needs are attended to, leave the child and do not respond to calls or requests.

So many people think you should not awaken the child in the morning. It is true that the child's sleep should be undisturbed, but if he has gone to bed at an early hour, you should awaken him about seven or seven-thirty so it will be simpler for him when he reaches school age to adopt himself to the necessity of getting off for kindergarten or school promptly.

A fairly early rising hour is advisable for the young child in order that it won't crowd the child's breakfast too near his noon meal.

The infant should have in addition to twelve hours of sleep at night, two naps during the day until he goes on a three meal a-day schedule. The baby who is too exhausted to eat his dinner is not set up a satisfactory habit as regards either eating or sleeping.

If a child from babyhood is brought in from play, undressed and washed, and made practically ready for bed before his noon meal, he will be less likely to plead to go out again to play. Rest aids digestion.

It is important to keep the child's attitude toward bed and sleep a pleasant one, since our sleep is largely conditioned by our attitudes and surroundings.

Below the age of one year, babies take several naps a day. Up to six months the day sleep totals about five hours, from six to seven months, about three hours (correction..to twelve months) (about three hours). It gradually decreases until, from the age of three to the age of five, the length of the nap is about one

hour.

I have observed that children who are gradually outgrowing the nap habit usually take a nap perhaps one day out of three or four, the one day out of six or seven, finally he does not take a nap during the day unless he has been up extra late for some cause or other.

Most parents talk about the sleeping habits of their children so much that the child comes to the conclusion that it is rather a penalization at the end of play than a period for relaxation and enjoyment. Children who come to this conclusion have bad attitudes toward this habit.

Parents who sit and talk about fires, burglars etc. cause the child to acquire states of fear, thus wanting the companionship of the parent at night. This child also becomes restless and does not sleep regularly. Dr. Blanton remarks, "The night is more important as an index to the past day than an introduction to tomorrow."

Physical causes of poor sleep are often overlooked by the parent, as : digestive difficulties, irregular movement of the bowels, enlarged or inflamed tonsils, breathing difficulties etc. The parent should attend to these defects.

If the child wakes very early in the morning, the mother should investigate. Sometimes the very small child is wet and uncomfortable. Occasionally the child is hungry. These problems can be solved by giving the hungry child a little more supper, and getting up at a certain time each morning carrying the child whos wets the bed to the bathroom.

The child should be kept to regular hours and have adequate sleeping arrangements.

ELIMINATIVE HABITS

Usually the child is trained for bowel control before that for bladder control. We should begin training for this during early childhood.

Faegre and Anderson says that the training may begin as early as the sixth week, if the baby is in good physical condition. The mother may hold the infant over a receptacle in her lap, the child's back being toward her, and supported by her arms and body.

Van Blarcom agrees with this and also that the child should not be bored with sitting or being held over a receptacle too long. The young baby should not be held over the vessel more than two or three minutes. The older child may have a trial of five minutes. If he does not succeed, another trial should be made later.

Schick and Rosenson agree that the extremely early training depends to a considerable extent, upon the general muscular development but contends that the modern tendency to begin this training with most infants at the age of two to three months. This act requires a more mature muscular development than is present at two or three months. This muscular development is reached in the average baby at about the fifth or sixth month when he is usually able to sit up with support.

All agree that the same place and hour should be chosen each day, preferably directly after one of the morning or afternoon feedings. By the age of one year, some children are trained to have only one movement daily, directly after breakfast.

All distractions, such as the presence of toys, pets, and other toys and children should be removed until the habit is definitely formed.

The mother's smile will often help the young baby to be successful. Some favorite toy may be given to the older child (who is bored because of sitting still) after he has had a bowel movement.

Diet should be depended on to bring about proper habits of elimination, but in a few cases, it is helpful to use a suppository of soap or glycerin to alter the movement to a suitable time of day. The young baby may have prune and fig juice, the older child the pulp of the cooked fruits, both night and morning, together with a glass of warm water before breakfast. Castor oil should not be given.

At the age of two the child's control of the bowel movement should have been accomplished.

A physician should be consulted before trying to remedy extreme constipation or loose bowel movements.

In training for the dry habit, the time of beginning is largely dependent on how much time the mother has to spend with the child.

Complete control of urination at night is sometimes delayed until the age of three even in normal children.

Full responsibility is possible at three and one half or four years, if the child's clothes are easily managed.

SUMMARY

In summarizing my thesis, I may say that the child inherits some action patterns and acquires others. The process of building habit is essentially the process of making certain connections between stimuli and responses of knitting responses into patterns. If we could control the behavior of the child and build into his behavior correct modes of meeting situations, we must seek to determine the stimuli which will produce, correct actions; and if the child is acting incorrectly, must ask what stimuli are producing the incorrect responses. We notice that in acquiring a habit the child goes through trial and error behavior, making many seemingly useless and unnecessary responses; that through practice these disappear; that a satisfactory result to the child helps to establish that response; and that a beginning must be early and simple. The environment of the child should be well controlled.

Mealtime should be a happy time. The talk should include some topics of interest to the child. The dinner table is not the place to discuss unpleasant or shocking topics.

Serve three meals a day at the same hour every day. Irregularity in serving meals encourages the child to eat between meals.

There should be a variation in the preparation of the food. Give the child, whose dislike is milk, an extra amount of other forms---soups, puddings, and custards.

Irritation and anxiety may further undesirable habits. The calm mother who provides the right food and expects her children to eat it is seldom troubled with eating problems.

The New-born baby sleeps most of the time. His growth--most rapid at this time--depends in part on the large proportion of time which he spends in quiet and solitude.

It is desirable that each child sleep in the bed alone in his own room (well ventilated). So-called laziness is often found to be the result of lack of sleep, or of sleep under unfavorable conditions.

A regular bedtime must be set and adhered to. It is nice for the adult and the child to go to bed by the clock. It encourages promptness and regularity.

A fairly early rising hour is advisable. It does not crowd the child's breakfast too near his noon meal.

Elimination is a fundamental bodily need. Proper training is necessary and regularity of procedure and time schedule are important, as in the establishment of other habits. Definite times for elimination (with no exception) do much to help the child feel that this is a regular part of the days procedure.

The child's confidence in himself must be established and he must be assured that he can care for himself without mother's aid.

Full responsibility is possible at three and one-half or four years, if the child's clothes are easily managed.

It is my desire that every child should be placed in a good, well controlled environment. Good habits are as readily acquired as bad provided conditions are favorable.

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